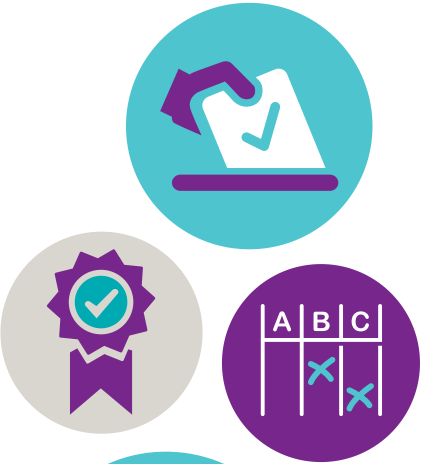
An A-Z Guide www.nala.ie

A Plain English Guide to Political Terms





NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency

Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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This guide is intended only as a guide
for members of the public. Please note
that the descriptions are only a guide to
political terms and are not strict legal or
scientific definitions.

About this guide

This plain English guide focuses on political terms as part of our ongoing campaign on literacy and political participation.

Literacy difficulties can be a barrier to accessing, understanding and using information. As a result, adults with literacy difficulties may be excluded from:

- voting in elections and referendums;
- getting involved in political parties or local lobby groups; and
- understanding government and how it works for them.

This guide aims to help the public become more familiar with some of the most common political terms. We also hope it will remove some of the barriers that may currently prevent people from getting involved in political activity – whether that means voting, lobbying their local representative or joining a political party.

The guide and the campaign also aim to encourage state organisations and political parties to be more aware of the issues faced by the 1 in 6 adults with literacy difficulties in Ireland (OECD 2012) and to develop effective and sensitive responses to support them to become more politically active.

A list of the main political parties is included on page 61.

We aim to update this guide regularly to make sure that it stays relevant. Please email any suggestions to us at info@nala.ie.

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Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Aa

Act

A law that has been passed by the Government (or legislature) and approved by the President

See also Bill and Legislature.

Activist

A person who takes up a social or political cause and campaigns for it – for example, affordable housing or migrant rights

Ad hoc committee

A committee that is formed to carry out a particular task and then breaks up when the task is over

Aegis

A form of protection or support from a more powerful organisation. For example, a state agency would have the support of a Government department. They would work under the 'aegis' of that department

Agenda

A list of things to be done

Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Department of

The Government department responsible for supporting and regulating agriculture and food industries

Amendment

A minor change to a law or contract

Anarchy

A society with political and social disorder caused by lack of government control and a disregard of the law by citizens

Anthem

An uplifting song of praise; called a national anthem when it is about a country

Antisocial behaviour (sometimes anti-social)

Acting in a violent or threatening way that alarms or distresses people and makes them feel unsafe

Áras an Uachtaráin

Official residence of the President of Ireland

See also President of Ireland.

Ard Fheis

An Irish term for the official gathering or conference of a political party each year. The conference discusses the party's policies and structure, and votes on any changes that are proposed

Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Department of

The Government department responsible for developing the arts and protecting the cultural and built heritage of the country. This Department also promotes the development of Gaeltacht areas and supports Irish as the principal language of Gaeltacht regions

Assembly

A group of people gathered together for a special purpose, sometimes as a law-making body, as in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Attorney General (AG)

The main legal advisor to the Irish Government, who is appointed by the President on the Taoiseach's nomination

Bb

Backbench

The seats occupied in Dáil Eireann by any member of the Irish Government who is not a minister or junior minister

See also Dáil Éireann, Minister and Junior Minister.

Bailout

Financial support given to a company or country facing financial ruin

Balanced budget

A government's annual budget in which income (for example from taxes) is equal to spending

Balance of power

Power held by a small party or group of independent representatives when a major political party needs their support to form a government

See also Coalition government.

Ballot

A way of voting in secret, usually using a ballot paper and ballot box

See also Ballot paper and Ballot box.

Ballot box

A container for storing completed ballot papers during an election or referendum. The boxes are only opened when votes are ready to be counted

Ballot box 'stuffing'

An illegal action that involves voting many times to affect the result of an election

Ballot paper

A slip of paper, usually with representatives' names and photos, that registered voters use to mark their preferences in an election. A referendum ballot paper will have the wording of the proposed change to the Constitution for the people to vote for or against

Bandwagon effect

The tendency for a popular candidate or proposal to gather even more support simply because they appear to be winning; also called the 'snowball effect'

Bias

Favouring one argument or person over others, usually unfairly; prejudice

Bi-cameral legislature

A law-making body, known in Ireland as the Oireachtas, that is divided into a lower and an upper house. The Dáil is the lower house; the Seanad is the upper house

See also Dáil Éireann, Legislature, Oireachtas and Seanad Éireann.

'Big Brother'

A type of state, envisaged by George Orwell in his novel Nineteen Eighty Four, in which the government tracks each person's movements and knows everything about all citizens

Bill (law)

A draft of a new law or change to a current law that has yet to be passed by the Oireachtas

See also Act and Oireachtas.

Bill, Private Member's

A proposal for a new law that comes from an individual TD or Senator

Bi-partisanship

Co-operation on an issue or issues by two people or groups. In politics, it is where opposing parties agree on particular issues

Broadcast moratorium

A broadcast moratorium is a period of time – usually most of the day before an election or referendum and the day of voting itself – where radio and TV broadcasters must not include any information in their programming that might influence voters. The moratorium is imposed by the Broadcast Authority of Ireland

'Brown envelope'

A term referring to the practice of politicians receiving illegal payments (in brown envelopes) in exchange for political favours

Branch

A local division of a political party that draws members from a local area

Budget deficit

When government revenue is less than government spending

Bunreacht na hÉireann

Irish Constitution - see Constitution of Ireland

Cc

Cabinet

The group of Government Ministers and the Taoiseach, which decides policy and is responsible for all the Government departments

Campaign

Organised actions by individuals and political parties to influence voters' decision-making – for example, public meetings, media coverage and so on

Campaign spending limits

Limits on the amount of money that political candidates can spend on an election campaign

Candidate

Someone who stands for election to a representative office

Canvassing

Trying to win votes by contacting voters directly, for example by going door to door

Capitalism

An economic and political system in which private individuals and corporations control trade and industry

Cathaoirleach

The Irish word for chairperson

Caucus

A group or a meeting of people, especially members of a political party, with power to decide on policy

Cause

A goal or aim of a group of people, normally for social or political change

Ceann Comhairle

The chairperson of Dáil Éireann who chairs its proceedings (meetings) and makes sure that all members of the Dáil are treated fairly

See also Dáil Eireann.

Census

An official count of a country's population. In Ireland, the census is carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) every five years

Centre

The middle point of the political range, from 'far left' (communism) to 'far right' (fascism)

See also Conservative, Fascism, Left-wing, Right-wing and Socialism.

Centrist

A person with moderate political opinions and policies

Checks and balances

A term describing the actions of the three branches of government – the legislature, executive, and judiciary - to monitor (check) each other's work and limit each other's powers (balance) so no branch becomes too powerful

See also Executive, Legislature, Judiciary and Separation of powers.

Chief Justice

The head of the Supreme Court

See Supreme Court.

Chief State Solicitor's Office

The office that represents the State, the Attorney General, Government departments and certain State agencies in legal cases

Children and Youth Affairs, Department of

The Government department responsible for the development of policies and services for children and young people

Citizen

A legally recognised member of a city, state or nation who enjoys its legal, social and political rights

Citizenship (Irish)

A legal status granted by the State to those who are entitled to it, either by birth, descent or 'naturalisation'. Naturalisation is when a foreign national is granted Irish citizenship by meeting certain conditions

Citizenship rights

Rights that are enjoyed by a citizen, such as the right to vote and to live permanently in a particular country

See also Citizenship (Irish)

City councils

Local authorities responsible for services such as housing, planning, roads, water supply and recreation facilities in Dublin Cork and Galway

City and County Councils

Local authorities responsible for services such as housing, planning, roads, water supply and recreation facilities in both a city and a county

Chief Executive (formerly city or county managers)

The person who manages the local authority of a region

Civic participation or engagement

When people use the freedoms of democracy to do things such as sign a petition, contact their local councillor, vote, stand for election and become informed on issues

Civil and political rights

Freedoms and entitlements given by a nation to its people, including the right to a fair trial, the right to privacy, the right to marry, the right to take part in public life and the right to freedom of movement

Civil liberty

The freedom to act, assemble, think or speak as you wish, regulated only as much as is needed for the good of other people

Civil service

The body of Government workers and officials who advise ministers and carry out the day-to-day work of Government departments

Coalition

A collection of two or more groups or parties who unite, usually to form a government or opposition

Coalition government

A government made up of more than one political party because no single party got enough votes to form a government on its own

See also Balance of power.

Code of conduct for office holders

Rules for TDs and Senators to make sure they behave ethically, fairly and responsibly and act in the best interests of the public

Committee on Procedures and Privileges

A committee in Dáil Éireann and in Seanad Éireann that works to make sure that members of each house do not act in a way that abuses the power that comes with their position

Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Department of

The Government department responsible for regulating and overseeing the broadcasting, telecommunications and energy sectors. It also regulates and protects marine and natural resources, such as minerals and oil

Communism

An economic and political system put into place after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 in which people share the ownership of all goods and property; also, a system, such as in the former Soviet Union, where the government controls every aspect of a citizen's life and denies political freedoms

Communist

A person who supports communism

Consensus

Agreement that is generally acceptable

Conservation

Using natural resources carefully (for example minerals, gas water or plants) and maintaining places of environmental or cultural importance to make sure they are available to future generations

Conservative

A person or political party who wishes to keep things the way they are, supports traditional values and opposes government interference; known as 'right', 'right wing' or 'right of centre' in politics

See also Right-wing.

Constituency

A specific region where the political representatives are elected by the voters living there.

Constituency boundary

The border between one constituency and another

Constitution

A set of governing principles used by an organisation, including a country or a state; or the document setting out those principles

See also Constitution of Ireland.

Constitution of Ireland

Known in Irish as Bunreacht na hÉireann, the document in force since 29 December 1937 that outlines the values and structures of the State and the rights of its citizens. The Constitution can only be changed by the agreement of the people. This is known as a Constitutional Referendum

See Referendum

Convention

An agreement between nations or sides, for example the European Convention on Human Rights; also, a formal meeting of members or representatives of groups such as political parties, professional associations or industry groups

Council of State

The group of current and past Taoisigh (Prime Ministers), Presidents, Chief Justices, the Ceann Comhairle, the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad and the Attorney General, which advises the President of Ireland. The Council must be consulted before the President calls a meeting of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, or signs new bills into law

Councillor

A person elected to a local authority such as a county or city council. To represent the people living in that area.

County council

A type of local authority covering a county that is responsible for services including housing, planning, roads, water supply and recreation facilities

County Registrar

An official attached to the Irish Circuit Court whose role includes making sure that the counting of votes at an election or referendum is carried out properly

See also Returning Officer.

Dd

Dáil Committee

A committee of members of the Dáil which considers matters relating to how TDs and certain public bodies carry out their functions

Dáil Éireann

Known as 'the Dáil' for short, the lower house of the Oireachtas, in which members carry out a number of functions, such as debating and voting on issues and passing bills

See also Oireachtas, Seanad Éireann and TD.

'Dark horse' candidate

An almost unknown contestant in an election who achieves unexpected support

Data Protection Commissioner

An independent person appointed by the Government to make sure that people can keep their right to privacy when information about them is held on computers or on paper. The Commissioner deals with complaints from anyone who feels their rights have been infringed

Defamation

Saying or writing something false about a living person that is proven to damage their reputation in the eyes of right- minded people

See also Libel and Slander.

Defence, Department of

The Government department responsible for managing, training, organising and equipping the defence forces and co-ordinating and overseeing emergency planning in response to threats

Deficit

When the Government is spending more money than it is taking in

See also Surplus (economic).

Delegate

A person who attends a political or other conference and who has been given the power to represent others and make decisions for them at that conference

Democracy

A society that favours equal rights, fair trials and freedom of speech, and in which people govern themselves (direct democracy) or are governed by elected officials (representative democracy)

Democratic rights

Rights to political and social equality for all citizens

Demonstration

In political terms, a public show of protest against or sympathy with a particular cause

Deputy

In Ireland, the short name for someone elected to Dáil Éireann to represent their constituency

See also Constituency and TD (Teachta Dála).

Despot

A ruler who exercises total power, especially in a cruel or harsh way

Devolution

Where the central government of a state passes a law to transfer certain powers to local, regional or national authorities while still keeping the central government's overall authority

Dictator

A ruler who has total power over a country or state, regardless of the laws of the state or the views of any opposing parties

Dictatorship

A state in which one person or group has total power to govern

Diplomat

A person appointed to represent Ireland in other countries and to manage our relations with those countries

Director of Consumer Affairs

An independent person appointed by Government who is responsible for defending, enforcing and providing advice and information on consumer rights

'Dirty politics'

Unethical and illegal methods to gain political advantage

See also Mudslinging.

Dissolution

An action by the President of Ireland (with the support of the Taoiseach) to end the current term of the Dáil so a general election can be held

Ee

Economic and social rights

Rights that help people develop and enjoy an adequate standard of living, such as the right to work, the right to education and the right to free time, as outlined in the Covenant on Economic and Social Rights adopted by the United Nations 1966

Economic policy

A Government plan on how to manage money and taxes

Education and Skills, Department of

The Government department responsible for providing public education and training and devising policy to meet ongoing and future needs

Election

Choosing a person or a government by voting

Election day

The day when people cast their vote

Election expenses

Amounts that political parties and independent candidates spend on advertising, canvassing and opposing other candidates during election campaigns. Since 1997, election expenses must be accounted for and fall within certain limits. The limits differ depending on the size of the constituency

Elector

A person who votes or has the right to vote

Electoral Register (also known as Register of Electors)

A list of those who have the right to vote in referendums and elections in Ireland. The register is organised by electoral area and is put together by local authorities (city and county councils)

Electorate

All those who have a right to vote in an election

Electronic voting

Using electronic equipment and computers to vote and count votes

Environment, Community and Local Government, Department of

The Government department responsible for protecting the environment. It oversees the local authorities and has responsibility for community and rural development. It also has functions relating to housing and managing elections

Empowerment

Making it possible for people to understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens

Executive

The Executive is the branch that ensures the law is put into practice. The power to run the State is divided in three – legislative power (make law), executive power (enforce law) and judicial power (apply the law)

See also Legislature and Judiciary.

Exit poll

A survey of some voters leaving a polling station asking them who (or what) they voted for to give an early indication of voting trends and help predict results

Ff

Finance, Department of

The Government department responsible for the economic and financial management of the State

Fiscal

Relating to financial matters, particularly government revenue such as taxes

Floating voter

A person who is undecided about how to vote in an election or referendum; a voter who doesn't always vote for the same political party

Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of

The Government department responsible for promoting and protecting Ireland's political and economic interests abroad. It is also responsible for foreign trade and development

Franchise

In political terms, a citizen's right to vote at elections

See also Suffrage.

Free market

An economic system where prices are set not by government but by competition between businesses

See also Capitalism.

Freedom of Information Act

A law giving a person the right to access certain information held by public bodies and Government departments, and to have any incomplete or false personal information corrected. A person is also entitled to get reasons for any public body's decisions that affect them

Freedom of speech

A right to speak freely on social and political matters without censorship or fear of forced silence

Front bench

Members of the Dáil who are ministers or spokespeople.

See also Junior minister, Minister, Shadow minister.

Front runner

A candidate who is likely to win an election or be nominated by their party to take part in an election

Gg

Gaisce

An award given by the President to young people between the ages of 15 and 25 for participating in several activities for a certain period. There are three awards; bronze, silver and gold

See President's Award.

Gender gap

The difference between men and women in types and levels of employment, earnings and educational qualifications among other areas

General election

A national election for all seats in the Dáil and Seanad. The Dáil election must be held within 30 days of the dissolution of the old Dáil; the Seanad election must be held within 90 days of the dissolution

See also Dissolution, Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann.

Gerrymander

Deliberately dividing a constituency in a way that gives an advantage to one political party or to particular voters

Government

A system, involving a group of senior ministers, that runs a state and puts the laws into effect

See also Executive.

Government Chief Whip

The person responsible for organising and co-ordinating Government business in Dáil Éireann

Government department

A group of civil servants, headed by a minister, which is responsible for a specific area of work within a government – for example health or the environment

Government revenue

Income that a government gets from taxes, duties, levies and so on

Grass roots

Ordinary people regarded as the main supporters of an organisation or political party

Grassroots movement

The action of groups of like-minded people who lobby for change on a particular issue, usually through door-to-door canvassing, letter writing, local meetings and so on

Green Paper

A document that sets out ideas about a proposed new law and invites comments from individuals and interested groups

See also White Paper.

Hh

Head of state

The chief public representative of a country – for example, the President in Ireland and the Queen in the United Kingdom

Health, Department of

The Government department responsible for managing, regulating and developing the health services. It is also responsible for protecting and promoting public health

House of parliament

A gathering of representatives to debate issues and make laws, for example Dáil Éireann or Seanad Éireann

See also Bi-cameral, Dáil Éireann, Legislature, Oireachtas and Seanad Éireann.

Hustings

Public meetings in the run up to an election where candidates outline their policies as part of their election campaign

Ii

Ideology

A way of thinking based on a set of connected ideas and beliefs, usually about a political system

Implement

To make something happen; to carry out a plan

Inaugural

First

Incumbent

A person who currently holds a post or office

Independence

Freedom from the influence or rule of another person, group or country

Independent

A TD, Senator or Councillor who does not belong to a political party

Indicator

A sign that something is happening; used by public bodies and other organisations to show the progress of a country in meeting a range of economic, social and environmental goals

Influence

The power to change the behaviour of someone or something

Interculturalism

A way of thinking that favours different cultures mixing with each other and learning about each other's music, art, literature, customs and so on to help prevent misunderstandings and fight racism

Interest group

A group of people organised to take action about a cause or interest

Jj

Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of

The Government department responsible for the promotion and development of enterprise, employment, the protection of workers and the regulation of businesses

Joint Oireachtas Committee

A committee made up of members of both the Dáil and Seanad to discuss and vote on particular matters

See also Dáil Committee and Seanad Committee.

Judicial review

The power of judges to review laws and official Government Acts to see if they are in keeping with the Constitution or basic rules of justice. If they are not, the judicial review can overturn them

See also Checks and balances, Constitution of Ireland, Legislature and Separation of powers.

Judiciary

The judiciary is the collective term for the judges of a country's courts. The role of the judiciary is to interpret laws and uphold justice by applying the law through the courts

See also Executive and Legislature.

Junior Minister

A member of government appointed by the Taoiseach to assist the senior minister of a Government department; officially called Minister of State

Justice and Equality, Department of

The Government department responsible for protecting the security of the State, implementing Government policy on crime, advising criminal justice institutions (prisons, courts, Gardaí and Probation and Welfare Services) and developing and implementing policies on immigration and asylum

Ll

Labour Court

A place that hears employment disputes when all other ways of resolving them have failed.

Labour movement

A broad group of workers that includes trade unions and the Labour Party

Lame duck

An elected representative, usually a leader, who is coming close to the end of their term of office, and who is regarded as being less powerful due to the limited time they have left to serve. The term applies particularly to those who cannot or do not want to be re-elected

Landslide victory

An overwhelming majority of votes for one candidate or party in an election

Law Reform Commission

An independent body set up by Government to review laws and advise the Government on necessary reforms, often after seeking the views of interest groups and the public

Leader of the opposition

The leader and main spokesperson of the largest political party that is not in government

Leas Cathaoirleach

The Irish for vice chairperson, the person who chairs local authority or Seanad Éireann meetings when the Cathaoirleach is not present

See also Cathaoirleach.

Leas Ceann Comhairle

The person who chairs Dáil Eireann meetings when the Ceann Comhairle is not present

Left, the

Organisations or political parties that favour social justice and freedom and aim to share a country's wealth between all people equally and focus on workers' rights

See also Centre and Right.

Left-wing

The section of a political system or party that favours social justice over the free market

See also Free market and Right wing.

'Leftie'

A slang term for a person who believes in the values of liberalism and socialism (usually meant as a criticism)

See also Liberal and Socialism.

Legal rights

Rights of all individuals in a society as outlined in the laws of the State

Legislation

A law, or a set of laws or the act of making laws

Legislature

The branch of government that makes laws, known in Ireland as the Oireachtas

See also Executive, Judiciary, Oireachtas and Separation of powers.

Legislative power

The power to make and change laws

Legislative process

A series of actions that result in a law being made

Libel

A published (in print or on the internet) or broadcast statement about a person that is proven to be false and damaging to their reputation

See also Defamation and Slander.

Liberalism

A broad political ideology that generally favours individual freedom, open government and the free market, but which supports the input of government to protect the economy and vulnerable citizens

See also Ideology and Free market.

Libertarian

A person who supports individual personal and property rights and minimal government involvement in people's lives

See also Liberalism.

Liberty

Freedom from control by a person or group

Lobby

An organised attempt by individuals or groups to influence decision makers – for example, by writing letters, making proposals or meeting decision makers

Lobby group

A group that tries to get support for a particular cause to change laws or certain actions

See also Register of Lobbying and Lobbyist.

Lobbyist

A person who lobbies

See also Register of Lobbying.

Local authority

A form of government at a local level, consisting of elected officials and full-time staff, which is responsible for providing a range of public services for that local area – for example libraries and swimming pools

Local authority meetings

Regular gatherings of elected members which are open to the public and the media. The meetings decide on the direction and work of the local authority

Local Community Development Committees

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) replaced County Development Boards under the Local Government Reform Act 2014

Local elections

Elections held in Ireland every five years, usually in May or June, to elect councillors to represent their communities in local authorities around the country

Local government

A term describing the system of county and city councils whose members are elected by the people

See also Local authority, Councillor and County council.

Mm

Majority

The difference between the largest number of votes for or against something and the number of remaining votes

Majority party

The political party that wins more seats in an election than other political parties

Mandate

The authority to represent people's interests and take action on their behalf

Manifesto

A document stating a political party's values, goals and intended actions

See also Platform.

Marginal seat

A seat held by a political party by a very narrow margin and, so, at risk of being lost

Matching funds

The amount of money that a group must raise if it seeks a grant, for example from the Government that requires the applicant to match the amount of the grant sought

Mayor

An elected or appointed head of a city or town

Member

A person who belongs to an organisation or body

Member of the European Parliament (MEP)

An elected politician who represents a region of their own country in the European Parliament

Military rule

A system of government where army officers form the government

Minister

A member of the Irish Government who runs and manages a department and may propose new or amended laws

Ministerial

Relating to a minister

Monarch

A king or queen

Monarchy

A system of government in which a king or queen is the head of state

Motion of 'no confidence'

A vote on the performance of a leader or a government, usually proposed by the opposition, that, if passed, may require the person to resign or the government to stand down and request a general election

See also Dissolution and Opposition.

Mudslinging

The practice of saying negative things about an opponent during a political campaign; also known as 'dirty politics'

See also Dirty politics.

Multi-culturalism

An ideology or way of thinking that favours the presence of many cultures in society, each with equal rights

See also Ideology and Inter-culturalism.

Municipal districts

Municipal districts replaced town authorities under the Local Government Reform Act 2014. There are 95 municipal districts countrywide

Nn

Nanny state

Where government policy is considered to be over-protective, or the Government is regarded as interfering unduly with personal choice

Nation

A group of people, often united by language or culture, who think of themselves as a community and have, or want to have, their own government

National

Belonging to or relating to a nation

National debt

The total amount of money owed by a government

Nationalise

Bringing an industry under the control or ownership of a government

Nationalism

A belief that a large group of people are or should be a nation with its own government and a policy of promoting and supporting the interests of the nation over other nations or the common interests of all nations

NDP - National Development Plan

A Government plan to improve the economy and living standards by investing money in education and training, regional development, social services, roads and so on

Nominee

A person who is nominated, or proposed by others, as a candidate for public office

Non-partisan

Not supporting or controlled by a political party

Non-party candidate

An independent candidate, one who is not a member of a political party

NRA - National Roads Authority

The Government body responsible for planning, improving and managing the road network in Ireland

NTMA - National Treasury Management Agency

The Government body responsible for managing the Government's assets and national debt as well as certain funds such as the National Pensions Fund and the Dormant Accounts Fund

Oo

Oireachtas

The national parliament of Ireland, which consists of the President, Dáil Éireann (the lower house) and Seanad Éireann (the Senate or upper house), and whose powers and functions are outlined by the Constitution

See also Dáil Éireann, Legislature, President, Seanad Éireann and Separation of powers.

Ombudsman

A public official who is responsible for investigating complaints against public bodies, for example government departments, local authorities, the Health Services Executive and publicly funded third-level institutions. In addition to this Ombudsman, there are five other ombudsmen in Ireland to deal exclusively with complaints brought by: children, people receiving occupational pensions, members of the Defence Forces, members of An Garda Síochána, and people with complaints about financial services

One-person rule

A system of government in which one person holds all power over a country or state

See also Despot and Dictator.

Opposition

The non-government party or group of parties in the Dáil that disagree with Government policies and actions

'Opt out'

An exemption granted to a member state of the European Union (EU) not to be governed by certain EU decisions

OPW - Office of Public Works

The Government agency responsible for restoring and preserving state buildings, buying and fitting office accommodation for Government departments, building and maintaining Garda stations and prisons and managing flood relief and drainage programmes

Pp

PPPs - Public-Private Partnerships

Partnerships between public bodies and private businesses to fund, develop and sometimes operate services for the public – for example, roads, hospitals and transport services such as the Luas

Pacifism

A belief that violence, especially war, must be avoided when resolving disputes

Parliament

An assembly of elected representatives that forms the legislature of a state or a nation and may have both an upper and a lower house

See also Dáil Éireann, Oireachtas, Legislature and Seanad Éireann.

Parliamentarian

An elected member of the upper or lower houses of parliament

Parliamentary

Relating to the parliament

Parliamentary questions (PQs)

Questions that TDs ask the Government – orally or in writing – about any issue for which the Government is responsible. PQs are recorded in the Official Report of Parliamentary Debates in Dáil Éireann and on the website of the Houses of the Oireachtas

Parliamentary privileges

Certain rights granted to TDs and Senators in Ireland that are not enjoyed by the general public. For example, the right not to be sued for defamation because of anything they say in a speech in the Dáil or Seanad

See also Defamation.

Parliamentary wing (of a political party)

The people from a political party who have been elected to parliament

Partisan

A person who strongly supports a political party or cause

Party discipline

The control used by a political party, in particular its leader, to encourage its members in parliament to vote in the same way

Party policy

The rules, values and approaches that a political party obeys and follows

Party political

Relating to the business or interests of a political party

Personation

Voter fraud where a person pretends to be someone else so that they can vote more than once, or vote where they are not registered to do so

Petition

A document, usually containing signatures from many people, that is presented to a person or group in power by those asking for action on a matter

See also Lobby, Lobbyist, Lobby group

Philanthropy

The action, usually by wealthy people, of funding or giving other forms of practical support to organisations, without wanting anything in return, based on the desire to do good for society

Philosophy

A general view or a set of beliefs or attitudes that guides behaviour

See also Ideology.

Platform

A political party's written statement of its principles and policies on a number of topics, which is published during an election campaign

See also Manifesto.

Plebiscite

A vote by all voters on a topic or question – for example, in a referendum; or a vote by members of a party to decide on a candidate

Pledge

A solemn promise to do something, usually made when somebody takes a high-level official role

Policy

A statement of a person's or group's intended action on a matter

Political

Relating to how decisions are made within groups, for example political parties

See also Politics.

Political agenda

A set of issues that are dealt with in politics at a particular time

Political freedom

A person's right to express their political beliefs freely and to vote as they want

See also Political rights.

Political ideology

A range of beliefs on which the aims and activities of a political party are based

Political literacy

An awareness of political values, attitudes, arguments and institutions that allows a person to make an informed decision of how they vote and take action on issues

Political participation

Voting in a referendum or election and, or, taking part in political activities

Political parties

A list of all political parties registered in Ireland appears separately on page 61 of this booklet

Political rights

Rights that allow a person to take part in political life, including the right to vote, hold particular political views, join a political party and influence public life

See also Political freedom.

Political spectrum

The range of political thoughts, policies and approaches from the right to the left

See also Centre, Left-wing and Right-wing.

Political values

Beliefs and rules that are important to a political party or person, such as equality, liberty and tolerance of diversity

Politician

A person who is active in politics and holds a political office to which they have been elected

Politics

Activities associated with gaining power and governing a country

Poll

Asking and recording the opinion of people, for example in a survey or at an election

See also Exit poll and Straw poll.

Poll clerk

The poll clerk assists the presiding officer on polling day

See also Presiding Office

Polling card

A card sent to a person's address before an election or referendum stating where the person can cast their vote. The date in question and the opening and closing times of the polling station will also be stated.

Polling station

A place where people vote

Postal vote

Members of the Garda Síochána, the Defence Forces and Irish diplomats living abroad vote by post in elections and referendums. Other people may be eligible for a postal vote – for example, students living away from home; those with jobs that prevent them going to a polling station; those with a disability or illness, and so on. If you are registered as a postal voter, you cannot vote at a polling station

Populist

A person whose public views reflect the interests and concerns of the average person

Precedent

Something that has been done before and is a guide to what should be done again. For example, a decision in a legal case that is followed when similar cases come before the courts

Preferential voting

A voting system in which people vote for candidates in order of preference, putting 1 on the ballot paper beside their favourite candidate, 2 for their second favourite, 3 for their third favourite and so on

See also Candidate, Proportional representation and Single Transferable Vote.

President of Ireland

Irish head of state who is elected to serve a seven-year term (at most two terms). The President forms part of the Oireachtas, represents the people of Ireland when carrying out official engagements at home and abroad and has powers and functions that are set down in the Constitution

See also Bunreacht na hÉireann, Oireachtas and Legislature.

Presidential Commission

A group that carries out the functions of the President of Ireland if the President dies, resigns, permanently loses their health, fails to perform their functions or are out of the country or removed from office

President's Award (Gaisce)

An award programme for people aged 15 to 25 years to reward them for setting and achieving demanding challenges for themselves in the four categories of community involvement, personal skill, physical recreation and adventure activity

See also Gaisce.

Presiding Officer

The presiding officer is the person in charge of the polling station on the day of voting. They issue the stamped ballot papers to voters when they are satisfied as to the voter's identity. The presiding officer may order the arrest of any person suspected of committing an electoral offence, such as pretending to be another person in order to cast a fraudulent vote.

See also Personation.

Press gallery

An area or space in a house of parliament set aside for reporters from newspapers, radio and television (the media)

Prime Minister

The head of the national government

See also Taoiseach.

Private Member's Bill

See Bill, Private Member's.

Proclamation

A public announcement, for example the 1916 Proclamation – a public announcement of independence from British rule

Progressive

Favouring change and reform; welcoming new ideas and improvements

Propaganda

Ideas or information, not always true, used to promote or damage, an institution, an individual or a political cause

Proportional representation (PR)

An election system in which the number of seats won by a party is broadly in proportion to the share of the vote the party candidates received

See also Candidate, Constituency, Preferential voting, Quota, Seat and Single Transferable Vote.

Protest

A public statement or demonstration against a situation or the actions of others

See also Demonstration.

Protest vote

A vote for a candidate, not out of support for them, but to show disapproval of another political party and its candidate

Public

A term to describe as a whole the people of a community, state or nation, or a matter that is open to them or concerns them

Public Expenditure and Reform, Department of

The Government department responsible for advising the Government on the overall management and control of the public sector

Public funds

Money generated from taxes and other sources that is spent by a government

Public gallery

An area in a house of parliament, for example Dáil Éireann, that is set aside for the public

Public interest

The common wellbeing of a society, often considered when debating policies and interpreting and implementing laws

Public policy

A body of laws, regulations and government action on matters concerning the public

Public sector

The part of a country's economy that involves representing the public and providing and managing services for them – for example through schools, state bodies or hospitals

Public servant

A person who works with the civil service, a local authority or other state body

Public services

Services such as education, healthcare, roads and so on, that are wholly or partly funded through taxes

Private sector

The part of a country's economy that is involved in making profit, for example corporations, firms and banks

Qq

Question election results

The right of a registered voter (or someone entitled to be registered) to question the results of a Dáil election in their constituency. They must present a petition to the High Court no more than 28 days after the declaration of the result by the Returning Officer

See also Returning Officer.

Quota

The number of votes that a candidate needs to win a seat under the proportional representation (PR) system

See also Proportional representation and Single Transferable Vote.

Rr

Radical

Something very different from the usual or traditional, or a person who favours major political or social change

Radical reform

Major and dramatic changes, usually to an organisation and its activities

Reading (of a bill)

A formal stage in the passage of a bill, which involves considering what the bill covers and anything that should be removed or included

Rebellion

Open, organised and often armed opposition to a country's government or ruler

Referendum

A referendum is a vote by the people on a single political question. There are two kinds of referendums – ordinary and constitutional. All the referendums held in Ireland to date have been constitutional – that is, the people vote for or against a proposed change to the Constitution. The Government cannot pass laws that would change the Constitution without getting the consent of the people through a constitutional referendum

See also, Constitution of Ireland.

Referendum Commission

A group established before each referendum to tell the public what the referendum is about and to give the arguments for and against the proposal on which people will vote

Reformer

Someone who seeks to bring about change, especially political change

Regional Assemblies

Regional Assemblies replaced Regional Authorities. They are public bodies that handle EU Structural Funds and co-ordinate how public services are delivered in the region they cover. There are three assemblies covering all local authority areas: the Northern and Western Regional Assembly; Southern Regional Assembly; and Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

Register of Lobbying

An online listing showing who is lobbying, what the subject and aim of the lobbying is, who might benefit from the lobbying, and which public officials or politicians are being lobbied. The public can access the register on www.lobbying.ie

See also Lobby, Lobby Group, Lobbyist

Register of Political Parties

A list of legally registered political parties, which is entered on a ballot paper at elections

Regulation

A law made by an Act or sometimes a Government minister

Representative

A person who acts on behalf of others or someone elected to a law-making body

Representative democracy

A system of government where voters elect representatives to make decisions for them

Republic

A state that is ruled by elected representatives rather than by a monarch

See also Monarchy.

Republican

A person or group that campaigns for a republic in their country instead of a monarch

Republicanism

A political philosophy in favour of setting up a republic over any other political system

See also Philosophy and Republic.

Resolution

A plan to do something or encourage others to do it

Responsible government

A system in which a government answers for its actions to elected representatives of the people

Returning Officer

A person who supervises the counting of votes during an election or referendum, and who certifies and officially announces the results

See also County Registrar.

Revenue

Money coming in; usually associated with the money a government collects from the people through taxes and other sources

Revolution

A complete overthrow of a government or political system

Right, the

A term used to describe political parties and other groups who support traditional values, the free market and who oppose government interference

See also Conservative, Free market and Left, the.

Right-wing

A section of a political party, organisation or a system that tends to be conservative

See also Conservative, Free market and Left-wing.

Rights

Claims that society recognises as fair, such as legal rights, political rights, social rights and human rights

See also Civil rights and Political rights.

Rule of law

A system in which the law applies to and must be obeyed by everyone, including a head of state or a government

Ruling party

The political party that controls the government

Running mate

A person who runs for election in the same constituency as another candidate from the same party and is expected to get fewer votes; often used to describe the vice-presidential candidate in the United States during national elections

Ss

Single Transferable Vote - STV

A system of voting where several seats are available in a constituency. A person votes for their preferred candidate, and any unused votes for that candidate (for example, if they already have enough to be elected) are transferred to other candidates in the constituency until all seats are filled

See also Constituency, Preferential voting, Proportional representation, Quota and Seat.

Safe seat

A seat in a constituency that is likely to go to a particular candidate because of the amount of support given to the candidate or the political party they represent

Seanad Éireann

Known as 'the Seanad' for short, it is the upper house of the Irish parliament (Oireachtas), which currently has 60 members, known as Senators, who debate issues, revise laws passed in Dáil Éireann and sometimes begin the process of introducing new laws

See also Dáil Éireann, Legislature and Oireachtas.

Seat

A place in an elected political assembly, such as a parliament or county council

Select Committee

A committee in the Oireachtas, which consists of members of the Dáil or the Seanad, that is usually set up to review the work of a Government department

See also Joint Oireachtas Committee.

Self-government

Also known as self-rule, the political independence of a country, people or region

Senator

A member of the Senate, or Seanad Éireann in Ireland

Separation of powers

A system in which each of the three branches of government - legislature, executive and judiciary - have separate functions and powers and the right to check the activities of the other branches to make sure that none of them becomes too powerful

See also Checks and balances, Executive, Legislature and Judiciary.

Shadow minister

A term to describe each member of the opposition that 'shadows', or follows closely, the area of responsibility of a minister in a government

Slander

Something spoken about a person (for example at a public meeting) that is proven to be false and damaging to their reputation

See also Defamation and Libel.

Social and civil services

The range of services available to the public, for example social welfare, education, health services, family supports and services that help people assert their rights on consumer issues, employment, equality and refugee status, among others

Social Protection, Department of

The Government department responsible for devising and managing social welfare payments and benefits, and providing employment supports. It also manages the Rural Social Scheme and manages the payment of redundancy and insolvency payments

Social capital

A general term for the networks and common values in a community that allow its members to co-operate and support each other

Social partnership

A system in which the Government, employers, voluntary and community organisations and trade unions work out a plan that covers wages, industrial action, housing, transport, education and other issues that affect the country's social and economic development

Social welfare

State support for people when they are unemployed, ill, retired, widowed or caring full-time for others through payments or other benefits each week or month; known in other countries as social security

Socialism

A system and form of political thinking that favours distributing wealth and assets equally so that all people, either directly or through their governments, have a say in how the wealth and assets are used

See also Communism, Left-wing and Liberalism.

Socialist

A person who believes in and promotes the values of socialism

Society

A large gathering of many communities under generally accepted rules and values

Solidarity

Recognising the rights of others and joining with others to defend those rights

Sound bite

A brief, quotable remark repeated on radio and TV news programmes to reflect the position of a political candidate or other spokesperson on a topic

Special Committee

An Oireachtas committee set up only as needed so it can review a particular bill

See also Dáil Éireann, Oireachtas and Seanad Éireann.

Special voter

An example of a special voter is a person living in a hospital or nursing home, where they can vote in the hospital or nursing home if they are registered as a special voter. First-time applicants for special voter registration will be asked for a medical certificate

Spin

Public relations (PR) activity, for example press releases or interviews, or a way of presenting information that aims to enhance the public image of a person or group, such as a politician or their party, at the expense of a political opponent or the opposition party

Spoiled vote

A vote that is not included when counting all votes in an election because the voter has filled in their ballot paper incorrectly or has written their name on it

State

A territory controlled by a government or ruler with the aid of institutions such as the police, armed forces, the civil service and the courts

See also Territory.

Statute law

A law passed by parliament, as opposed to common law, which is set by decisions made in court

See also Civil law system and Common law system.

Statutory

Something that is decided, set up or controlled by statute law

Straw poll

An unofficial vote or survey to get an idea of the general opinion among a group on a given issue

See also Exit poll and Poll.

Submission

A set of suggestions or arguments spoken or in writing to a decision-making authority such as a Government department, a committee or a court

Suffrage

The right to vote

See also Franchise.

Supreme Court

The highest court in Ireland, which hears appeals of decisions from the High Court

Surplus (votes)

The amount of votes that exceed the quota needed for a candidate to be elected

See also Proportional representation, Quota and Single Transferable Vote.

Surplus (economic)

A situation in which the Government is taking in more money than it is spending

See also Deficit.

Swing voter

A person who votes, but whose support can switch from one political party to another, depending on the issue at stake

See also Floating voter

Tactical voting

Voting that does not express a voter's true preferences but may get a more favourable result. For example, helping to elect a candidate with wide public support instead of voting for a favourite candidate who may have little real chance of winning

Tt

Tallyman

A person who attends the counting of votes and, by watching the process, carries out an unofficial count of the ballot papers as the official count progresses

Tánaiste

Irish Deputy Prime Minister, who takes the place of the Taoiseach if the Taoiseach dies, permanently loses health, is temporarily absent or if a successor has not yet been appointed. In a coalition government, the office is usually held by the leader of the smaller party

See also Taoiseach and Coalition government.

Taoiseach

The head of the Irish Government, nominated by the Dáil, who speaks for the Government on major policy issues, chairs Cabinet meetings and has powers to reorganise the Cabinet

See also Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Taoiseach, Department of the

The Government department responsible for supporting and advising the Taoiseach and Government in carrying out their duties

Taxation

Money charged on incomes, property, goods and services that must be paid to a government

TD - Teachta Dála

One of 166 members of Dáil Eireann who represents their constituency, takes part in debates and question time, votes on bills, runs an office in their constituency and usually also provides a clinic - a service where the public can meet the TD at certain times during the week to discuss local issues

See also Dáil Éireann, Oireachtas and Seanad Éireann.

Term limit

The maximum number of times that a person may hold a particular political office

Territory

The land and waters under the control of a state or ruler

Terrorism

A co-ordinated movement involving planned acts of terror, for example bombings or poisonings, to frighten people into doing something they don't want to do

Think tank

A non-profit institute, corporation or group set up to research a range of topics and make recommendations to a government on public policy

See also Public policy.

Third way

Political thinking that borrows from the right and the left but is different to both

See also Left, Centre and Right.

Ticket

The list of candidates nominated by a political party in an election

Transport, Tourism and Sport, Department of

The Government department responsible for the national road and rail networks and associated areas such as public transport, driver testing and road safety. It is also responsible for the aviation industry. Additionally, this Department is responsible for the growth of sustainable tourism, and promotes sport at local, regional and national levels

Treaty

A formal agreement between states on trade, peace or other issues

Tribunal of inquiry

A body set up by the Oireachtas and headed by a judge to investigate matters of urgent public importance, such as corrupt practices by public representatives or poor management of public services. The tribunal communicates its findings and recommendations to the Oireachtas

Troika

Troika means 'group of three' and was the term used to describe the alliance of the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank during the economic downturn

Tyranny

Uncontrolled exercise of power, often by an oppressive or severe government or ruler

See also Despot and Dictator.

Tyrant

An absolute ruler who uses their power unjustly or oppressively

See also Despot and Dictator.

Uu

Unionism

A political philosophy that favours union between Northern Ireland and Britain under the British government

Upper house

In Ireland, the upper house is Seanad Éireann

See also Bi-cameral, Legislature and Seanad Éireann.

Vv

Values

Beliefs and rules on which a person or organisation bases their behaviour

Veto

Blocking or rejecting a proposed law or change to the constitution; sometimes exercised by the President of Ireland if they refuse to sign into law a bill passed by the Dáil and the Seanad

See also Council of State, Legislature, President of Ireland and Oireachtas.

Vote

A formal expression of a choice, such as putting one's hand up or marking a ballot paper

See also Ballot paper and Election.

Voter turnout

The number or percentage of all voters who cast a vote in a given election

Voter

A person who is entitled to vote and exercises their right to do so. A voter must be a citizen of Ireland over 18 years whose names appear on the Register of Electors

See also Register of Electors.

Ww

War chest

A fund for running a political campaign, consisting of money given to a candidate by other people and through various fundraising events

Welfare

The wellbeing of all; also the money provided by the government to those who cannot earn it themselves

See also Social welfare.

Whip

The manager of a political party who is responsible for organising members of their party to take part in debates and vote in a way that the party's leader desires

See also Chief Whip.

Whistleblower

An employee or a former employee of a business or public body who reports wrongdoing to another person who can take corrective action themselves or can embarrass others into doing so. Examples of wrongdoing would be fraud, underpaying staff, breaking safety regulations, and so on

White paper

A document that outlines a government's proposals on particular issues and sometimes forms the basis of later laws. A white paper is usually drafted after people have given feedback on the green paper

See also Green paper.

Winner-Take-All

A simple system of voting, in which the person with the most votes wins or 'takes all', in contrast to the system of proportional representation and the Single Transferable Vote. This system is sometimes called 'First past the post'

See also Proportional representation and Single Transferable Vote.

Registered Political Parties in Ireland

The following parties are listed as registered parties on the Register of Political Parties as at October 2015

Anti-Austerity Alliance – People before Profit
No party website at time of publication

Catholic Democrats (The National Party)
www.catholicdemocrats.ie

Communist Party of Ireland
www.communistpartyofireland.ie

Direct Democracy Ireland
www.directdemocracyireland.ie

Éirígí
www.eirigi.org

Fianna Fáil
www.fiannafail.ie

Fine Gael
www.finegael.ie

Fís Nua (Irish for 'New Vision')
www.fisnua.com

Green Party
www.greenparty.ie

Independents 4 Change
No party website at time of publication

Irish Democratic Party
www.irishdemocraticparty.ie

Kerry Independent Alliance
No party website at time of publication

Renua Ireland
www.renuaireland.com

Sinn Féin
www.sinnfein.ie

Social Democrats
www.socialdemocrats.ie

Socialist Party
www.socialistparty.ie

The Labour Party
www.labour.ie

The Workers' Party
www.workersparty.ie

United Left
No party website at time of publication

United People (UP)
www.unitedpeople.ie

Workers and Unemployed Action
wuag.wordpress.com

Make your voice heard







How do I vote?

First you need to register in order to be able to vote in an election or referendum in Ireland.

When you register, your name is added to the Register of Electors. The Register of Electors is a list of the names and addresses of all voters. You can check if you are registered to vote by going to **www.checktheregister.ie**.

You can also ask to see the Register of Electors at your local post office, Garda station, library or county council offices.

About a week before an election or referendum you will receive a polling card by post, giving details of where and when you need to go to vote. You will vote at your nearest polling station. Polling station simply means the place where you vote.

On the day of the election or referendum, bring your polling card and some photo identification with your name and show them to the officials at your polling station.

Valid forms of identification (with both name and photo) are:

- Passport
- Driving Licence
- Bus pass
- College or work ID

For an **Election**, you are then handed a ballot paper, which displays the names of the candidates in alphabetical order.

You then go to the booth and fill in your ballot paper, it is important to write 1 beside the name of your first choice, 2 beside the name of your second choice, 3 beside your third choice and so on as far as you wish to go.

For a **Referendum**, you will be handed a ballot paper which asks you a question to vote YES or NO. Put a large X in the box next to your choice.

Fold your ballot paper and place it in the sealed box – the ballot box.

Check **www.vote.ie** to find out more information about voting in Ireland.



What is NALA?

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent membership organisation, concerned with developing policy, advocacy, research and offering advisory services in adult literacy work in Ireland. NALA was established in 1980 and has campaigned since then for the recognition of, and response to, the adult literacy issue in Ireland.

National Adult Literacy Agency
Sandford Lodge
Sandford Close
Ranelagh
Dublin 6

Telephone (01) 412 7900
Fax (01) 497 6038
Email info@nala.ie

NALA website:
www.nala.ie

Plain English website:
www.simplyput.ie

Freephone support line:
1800 20 20 65

Ireland's EU Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014 - 2020
Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union

NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh